



SOUTH FLORIDA WILDLANDS ASSOCIATION

June 30, 2013

Ed Garrett
Florida DEP / Mining, Mitigation and Delineation
Oil and Gas Program
2051 East Paul Dirac Drive - M.S. 715
Tallahassee, FL 32310
Ed.Garrett@dep.state.fl.us

Dear Mr. Garrett:

South Florida Wildlands Association (SFWA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed oil operations east of the intersection of Desoto Blvd. and Southeast 24th Ave. in the Rural Estates of Collier County, Florida. As we provided initial comments to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) via email in response to an earlier deadline on this project, we have attached those at the conclusion of this letter in order to consolidate all comments from our organization into a single document. These comments apply equally to the applications for a Class II Injection Well Construction Permit - Oil and Gas Drilling Permit 1354 (Collier 22-5 SWDW) - as well as Oil Well Permit 1353 (Collier 22-3H).

SFWA was established in March of 2010 as an IRS recognized 501c3 organization to protect remaining wildlife, wilderness, and habitat in south Florida. In that short time we have established an extensive track record in the greater Big Cypress Basin - often referred to as the Western Everglades - protecting its diverse flora and fauna and priceless public lands from an array of threats which would destroy, degrade, or fragment wildlife habitat. We accomplish this task through advocacy directed at state and federal agency staff and elected officials, emailed action alerts and social media posts to our approximately 5,000 supporters, educational talks to the community, field trips, and, where necessary, litigation.

It should be pointed out at the outset that the Western Everglades south of the Caloosahatchee River is the only remaining home for the breeding population of federally listed Florida panthers (approximately 100 individuals remaining). SFWA has a special interest in protecting habitat for this iconic species. Chosen by Florida's schoolchildren in 1983 as our State Animal, the panther is also known as an "umbrella species" - protection of habitat for the panther protects habitat for literally thousands of species of plants and animals - many federally or state listed - found within its range (the Western Everglades is often referred to as "the Amazon" of North America due to its high level of biodiversity). Once ranging from east Texas to the Carolinas, the only big cat remaining in the eastern United States now struggles to survive on approximately 5 percent of its former range. Unfortunately, habitat loss and habitat degradation continue to occur at a seemingly never-ending and ever-increasing pace.